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Only U.S. citizens would be allowed to hold airport jobs that involve access to planes and baggage under proposed federal legislation that an Illinois congressman announced Tuesday.

In addition, responsibility for issuing airport employee security badges should be shifted from local authorities to the federal government, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) said in response to recent security problems uncovered at O'Hare International Airport.

Kirk called for the creation of "federal security zones" that would become the jurisdiction of the U.S. Transportation Security Administration at all U.S. airports. The federal agency would take over background checks on people seeking airport security credentials as well as verify their identity and legal status, Kirk said.

The proposed switch comes after federal immigration officials last week arrested more than 30 O'Hare workers who used fraudulent airport identification cards. Many of those arrested were working in the country illegally. The phony IDs were used to gain access to airplanes and other secure areas.

"This is not the way security should be run at one of the busiest airports in the United States," Kirk said.

Currently, local airport officials assign access badges to workers whose jobs include entering secure areas, including the airfield, aircraft and baggage-handling areas. Airport security guards, local police departments and the Transportation Security Administration all share responsibility for law enforcement at the airport.

But a host of problems at the TSA -- screeners failing to catch decoy bombs in undercover tests, low screener morale and high absenteeism -- raise questions about whether the federal security agency would do a better job protecting airports and passengers from terrorists and

criminals than the existing security regimen.

Pointing to recent lapses in O'Hare security, Kirk called for a series of upgrades as he and U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean (D-Ill.) convened a hearing in downtown Chicago to investigate problems at the airport.

Bean voiced concerns about workers being able to use O'Hare employee entrances without displaying valid badges or having their vehicles searched.

Ken Fletcher, the TSA's deputy federal security director at O'Hare, said the Chicago Department of Aviation recently completed issuing new security badges to all workers at O'Hare.

Although TSA officials promised to attack security loopholes, a City of Chicago aviation security official was unwilling to take any responsibility at the hearing for phony or expired employee badges getting into the hands of undocumented workers.

"We are fully compliant with all federal security regulations," said Joseph O'Connor Jr., deputy commissioner for security at the Chicago Department of Aviation.